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# **Girl-Child Education in Nigeria: Issues and Implications on National Development**

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## **Abstract**

*The importance of girl-child education to the development of any nation cannot be overemphasised. There is a saying that "if we educate a boy, we educate one person, but if we educate a girl, we educate a family and a nation". In many parts of the Africa, particularly in Nigeria, the girl-child face significant obstacles in accessing proper education, there is a serious gap between the boy-child education and that of girl-child due to inherent societal values placed on the boy-child over the girl-child. The girl-child has her destiny sealed by both tradition and culture on account of biological sex. There is also a seeming absence of policies that are specifically geared to attending to gender issues with obvious room for gender gap. It is on the basis of this that this paper examined issues in girl-child education in Nigeria and its implications on the development of the country. Peculiar issues such as access to education, school retention and drop out, equity as well as quality of education were closely examined vis-a-vis the implication on national development. The paper also proffered solutions to eradicating the problems facing girl-child education in Nigeria in order to achieve meaningful development. The paper concluded that education is the right of every girl-child, a key to transforming her life and making her a responsible member of the society. Therefore, the government should not only provide adequate policies to meet this yearning need, but also ensure that these policies are fully implemented.*

## **Introduction**

Education remains one of the most important creations of man on earth which has the power to change lives and bring development globally. In all

implications, education is a life changer and it has been shown to change the general perspective of the person seeking it. Education brings about knowledge, awareness, emancipation and empowerment to people, therefore for any nation seeking development change towards a positive direction, education must be a priority. Unfortunately this is not the case in Nigeria. According to Enejere (1991), the universal declaration of human right adopted by the United Nations, education is one of the fundamental human rights of every child regardless of gender, but the girl-child education has become a matter of concern to stake holders in Nigeria because this right has been duly denied in some quarters.

In Nigeria, there exists a degenerate belief that women are second class citizens, and that a woman is a man's property or pleasure object and therefore considered as a machine meant for producing children. This has resulted in unfair treatment of the girl-child especially with regards to education. According to Enejere (1991) and Ada (1992), the average rural Nigerian parents would rather invest in the education of their son rather than their daughter because of the societal value placed on the male child in the country over the girl-child. They opined that gender inequality in Nigeria is prompted by religion beliefs and communal customs which see the boy-child dominant to the girl-child. In the same vein, UNICEF (2007) reported that young girls particularly in the Northern part of Nigeria are denied the right of education; they are rather given out in early marriage and become teenage mothers thereby leading to negative consequences on the individual and the society at large. The report also shows that in northwest and northeast of Nigeria as few as 20% of women are literate and have attended school (UNICEF, 2007).

According to the 2006 National School Census (NSC) report a net enrolment ratio (NER) of 80.6% was recorded, where (19%) of primary school age population (6-11 years) is not enrolled in primary school nationwide. This figure represents about 5million Nigerian children aged 6-11 years old that do not access primary education (Tobre, 2013). According to Tobre (2013), this trend is more pronounced in eight states in Northern Nigeria namely, Kebbi, Sokoto, Bauchi, Jigawa, Yobe, Zamfara, Katsina and Gombe as they have the highest adolescent girl marriage, and female illiteracy. It was also noted that 10 states with the highest number of girls not in secondary school are found in the northwest, northeast and north central geo-political zones of Nigeria.

The issue of girl-child education is not just limited to the Northern region of the country alone; rather it is wide spread, affecting several states in the southern Nigeria. According to further findings made by Tobre (2013), it was revealed that Ebonyi state was at number 12 for states with the highest percentage of girls not in secondary school. Bayelsa state came 13<sup>th</sup> standing worse than Adamawa. Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa states for number of adolescence girls in marriage. On the indicator of females aged 20 to 24 years who gave birth before 18 years, Bayelsa again placed 13<sup>th</sup> while in the same category, Adamawa, Taraba and Niger states stood better than Delta, Rivers and Anambra States.

Overtime, access to basic education and equality has been a matter of concern to all tiers of government in Nigeria. According to Obaji (2005), there is a national gender disparity in basic education enrolment retention and completion which is not in favour of the girl-child. Girls and women from northern Nigeria and rural communities generally are at a disadvantage. In Northern Nigeria for instance, girls are often given away in early marriage and education of girls is considered as a waste of time since only the male progeny carry on the family

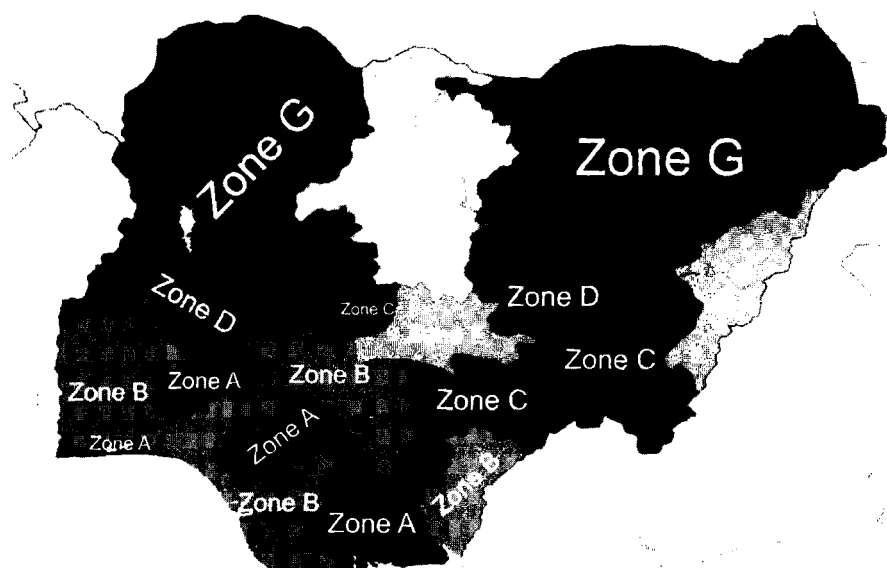
name when their parents die. In most cultures in Nigeria, the girl-child only pays subordinate role to the male child, as the girl-child is neglected right from birth. Uyanga (1995) confirmed that parents feel disappointed when the first born in the family is a girl and worst still when all children are female since parents feel that there will be no one to propagate the family lineage or take leadership of the family after death.

In the words of Adamu (2005), the neglect of girl education is cultural and religious inclined. This is contrary to the view by Rufai (1998) who attributed the neglect to various myths and superstitious beliefs peculiar to African traditional societies. Some of these myths and superstitious beliefs, according to Rufai, include uninformed cultural beliefs that educated women do not make submissive wives, are sometimes promiscuous, usually barren and carry attitudes that are not compatible with the traditionally expected roles as future wives and mothers. According to Rufai (1998), such myths and superstitious belief also uphold the belief that educated women always insist on equality with their male counterpart. Umar (1996) added that the girl-child, particularly in the Northern Nigeria, is made to believe that her place as the woman is in the kitchen and home and she is socialised into accepting her traditional roles of bearing and rearing children and also maintaining welfare of her family.

In a study conducted in the University of Ibadan, Oyo State, it was observed that the imbalance in participation in school activities by both boys and girls has to do with the long-held beliefs in male superiority and female subordination (Nwakwe, Faleye, Enumenu & Adelere, 2008). The situation is worsened by patriarchal practices in Nigeria which do not give girls any traditional right to succession thereby encouraging preferences to be given to the boy-child more than the girl-child. The decline in the country's economy since the early 1980s

has also worsened the situation by making education a luxury to many Nigerians, especially those in the rural areas (Adeniran, 2007). The implication is that parents are inclined to invest in children according to sex, birth order and natural endowment. Adeniran (2007) maintain that families who can only afford to send a child to school would only prefer to invest on the boy-child as the girl is expected to assume responsibilities in the home.

It is on the basis of this that this paper examined the issues in girl-child education in Nigeria and its implications on national development. Below is the map of Nigeria showing literacy levels in various states:



Source: Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics

*Figure 1. Map of Nigeria Showing Literacy Level.*

Zone A.....	More than 90%
Zone B.....	89-90%
Zone C.....	70-80%
Zone D.....	60-70%
Zone E.....	50-60%
Zone F.....	35-50%
Zone G.....	Below 35%

## **Theoretical perspective**

The predicament facing girl-child education in Nigeria can be explained from the perspectives of gender oppression theory. The theory describes women's situation as the consequences of a direct power relationship between men and women in which men have fundamental and concrete interest in controlling, using and oppressing women in the form of domination. By domination, the theory means any relationship in which one party, the dominant (individual or collective), succeeds in making the other party, the subordinate (individual or collective), an instrument of the dominant's will. Instrumentally, it is understood as involving the denial of the subordinate's independent subjectivity (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 1995).

Women's situation, for theorists of gender oppression, is central to the domination and oppression by men. The pattern of gender oppression is incorporated in the deepest and most pervasive ways into society's organization, a basic arrangement of domination most commonly called patriarchy. In this perspective, society is organised to privilege men in all aspect of social life including education as the case is in Nigerian. This reflects in girl-child education in the country where the boy-child is favoured and at advantage over the girl-child (Worth, 1989; Amaro, 1995).

## **Issues in girl-child education in Nigeria**

Some of the issues facing the girl-child education in Nigeria are discussed below.

### **i) Access to education**

Girl-child access to education in Nigeria has been an issue of concern to all stakeholders in the country. Many girls in the country do not have access to basic education, and this is more predominant in Northern Nigeria as access to



basic education has remained low. Findings from research conducted by UNICEF (2007) revealed that only 20% of women in northwest and northeast of the country are literate and have attended school. According to Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku (2008), factors such as a child labour, poverty, lack of sponsorship, quest for wealth, bereavement, truancy, broken home, and engagement of children as housemaids are said to be responsible for this. However, child labour has been identified as one of the greatest impediments to girl-child education in the country as many families send their daughters to work at a young age to get additional income needed for subsistence and to finance the education of male children.

#### **ii) School retention and drop-out**

Another issue facing the girl-education in Nigeria is the issue of school retention and drop-out. Studies conducted in Nigeria reveals that the number of girls out of school each year has rose from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002, and there exist wide variation across the states and zones with the North Central and North West presenting the worst scenario (Offorma, 2009). In many rural areas in the country, this syndrome affects more girls than boys with the exception of some eastern states where boys drop out of school to embark on trading. Social and cultural patterns combined with relatively poor quality of schooling, places the education and development of girls in a disadvantaged and vulnerable position. Girls bear the greatest burden of household responsibilities including care for sick parents and siblings and are usually first to drop out of school.

#### **iii) Inequity in enrolment**

One other strong issue facing girl-child education in Nigeria is the inequity in the enrolment of girl-child and boy-child, especially at primary and secondary levels. Statistics have shown that the enrolment trend from primary to

secondary school in Nigeria depicts disparity between male and female learners in the 36 states of the federation, Abuja inclusive (FME, 2006:4). According to the figures presented, the enrolment percentages of the boy-child are consistently higher than that of the girl-child, showing that there are still discrepancies in the enrolment of the boy-child and girl-child in schools in Nigeria. These differences are significant despite government programmes for girl-child education. The FME (2006:4) found out that in the south, more boys were enrolled than girls, while in the south-east there was bias towards girls enrolment. In the north, there was a strong evidence of bias towards boys' enrolment. Offorma (2008) established that disparity is more in the northern part of the country in favour of the boy child than in the southern part, while in south-eastern states there are more girls than boys in secondary school, with exception of Eboyin and Imo States where there are more boys than girls in pre-primary.

Table1

*Enrolment (2004) by Gender from Pre- Primary to Secondary School*

	<b>PRE- PRIMARY</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>PRIMARY</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SECONDARY</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>MALE</b>	937,997	51.13	12,273,046	55.12	1,567,011	56.54
<b>FEMALE</b>	896,522	48.87	9,994,361	44.88	1,204,623	43.46
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,834,519	100	22,267,407	100	2,771,634	100

Source: FME: Basic and Senior Secondary Education Statistics in Nigeria, 2004&2005

The table above shows the enrolment trend from the primary to secondary school in Nigeria depicting disparity between male and female learners in the 36 states of the federation, Abuja inclusive.

#### **(v) Quality of education**

Lastly, the quality of education given to the girl-child in Nigeria is also a major

issue facing the girl-child education in the country. The question is, what type of education should be given to the girl-child that will help her to adapt to the knowledge based economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The answer to this question can be attempted by x-raying what happens in Nigerian schools today. What obtains in schools in the country is de-motivated teachers, examination malpractices, gender biased curriculum, lack of school facilities, instructional materials and incessant strike action are some of the variables in the quality of education of children today (Offorma, 2009).

The girl-child, if given equal opportunity and quality education as the boy-child, can do better than the boy-child in all respects. Studies conducted in the country by UBEC (2005) indicated that boys performed better than girls in subjects such as English language and primary science, while girls performed better than boys in mathematics and social studies. This shows that foundation is imperative and must be solid with quality educational deliverables for the girl-child to become what she would want to be.

Table 2

*Mean Performance of Pupils in Core Subjects*

	MATHS		ENGLISH LANGUAGE		SOCIAL STUDIES		PRIMARY SCIENCE	
PRIMARY	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
4	36.72	37.22	26.05	24.87	25.26	25.27	40.36	40.41
5	47.06	37.77	25.02	25.74	26.93	26.20	38.13	47.98
6	35.65	35.57	20.38	20.98	21.21	19.75	39.78	41.14
TOTAL	39.81	36.85	23.82	23.86	24.47	23.74	39.42	43.18

Source: Calculated from UBE National Assembly Report (UBEC, 2003)

Table 2 above presents a summary of achievement at the primary school level in four (4) core subjects namely mathematics, English, social studies and primary science in 36 states including Abuja (FCT) in Nigeria.

**Table 3**

***Higher Score in Core Subject***

<b>SUBJECTS</b>	<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>
<b>MATHEMATICS</b>	Scored higher in 14 states	Highest scores m = 44.58
<b>ENGLISH LANGUAGE</b>	Higher score M = 28.88	Scored higher in 19 state
<b>SOCIAL STUDIES</b>	Scored higher is 14 state	Highest scores M= 29.88
<b>PRIMARY SCIENCE</b>	Highest M = 46.88	Scored higher in 25 state

Source: UBE National Assessment Report (UBEC, 2003)

Table 3 above shows that in English and primary science boys performed better than girls while in mathematics and social studies girls performed better than boys. In both cases, the scores are higher than the national mean score in 25 states in primary science and had the highest scores in mathematics; females also scored higher than males in 19 states in social studies. Generally, performance at primary school as shown by the national mean score is poor. This can be attributed to the quality of education offered at that level.

Following the ongoing, it is pertinent to say that issues facing the girl-child education in Nigeria is critical and needs urgent attention if the country would enjoy meaningful development. Based on the analysis, the girl-child would also likely do well or even better than the boy-child if given equal opportunity as the boy-child in accessing quality education. Therefore, it is important for the government to pay close attention to the girl-child education in Nigeria.

**Implications of issues in girl-child education in Nigeria on national development**

One very important aim of every family is to raise healthy and productive individuals who will contribute meaningfully to society.

This can be achieved through the education of the girl-child, who is the mother of tomorrow. According to UNICEF(2007), girls' education does not only bring the immediate benefit of empowering girls, but is seen as the best investment in a country's development as it helps the girl to develop essential life skills including self-confidence, the ability to participate effectively in society and protect themselves from exploitation and infectious maladies such as HIV and AIDS.

Education is the process of providing information to a person for mental, social, emotional, spiritual, political and economic development. It is essential for both boys and girls, but the benefits of educating the girl-child tend to be greater, as the girl-child education has been found to have more significant impact on poverty reduction and provision of sustainable development (Abdul, 2003). According to a UNICEF (1991) report, the education of girls is vital for the effective preparation of today's girl into tomorrows' responsible adult woman. The girl-child just like the male counterparts entitled to all the citizenship rights such as access to compulsory basic education and opportunity to higher education depending on her ability.

Education should be given to all citizens irrespective of gender, because in the history of man education is the most significant invention that has ever been made. According to (Agun, 1996), education serves as the means through which society maintains its survival and perpetuates itself. It is through education that society is managed, maintained and prevented from falling into chaos and decay and man is able to live, control and adjust to changes in his environment. Consequently, the girl-child should be conscientised that education is empowerment and when she is empowered, she can fight for her

rights and exercise them as such. Education of the girl-child therefore must be seen as a priority in the educational process of a country.

Neglecting the girl-child education denies her the knowledge and skills needed to advance her status thereby cast her in abject poverty, which may also be worsened by infectious maladies. When a girl-child is educated, she is able to realize her full potential, think, question and judge independently, develop civic sense, learn to respect her fellow human being and be good citizen (Abdul in Korede, 2008). According to Adamu (2005), when a girl-child is educated, her knowledge has been expanded, she is able to understand and undertake socio-economic, cultural and political transformation necessary to achieve development. It is believed that educating a girl-child is the only effective scheme to alleviate poverty and thus proportionally related to her living standard.

Adedokun and Olufunke (2010) suggests that educating the girl-child will help her to socialize, reproduce knowledge and even lead her towards the production of her knowledge. Gubio (1995) and Walkibe (2003) state that the girl-child should be sufficiently educated if she is prepared to contribute to the development of the society socially, economically, politically, morally, intellectually, spiritually and technologically. Gubio (1995) was particular about girl-child education and argued that an educated mind can hardly be misled but an uneducated and uninformed girl-child can be bent at any moment of emotional expression. According to Anyawu (1992), in education lies communal spirit as it helps people to respect the views of others by promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among people of a community. In the light of the above, let it suffice to mention that girl-child education is tantamount to the development of Nigeria as nation.

## **Recommendations**

For any reasonable development to be achieved, girl-child education must be a topmost priority for the government at all level. To achieve this, the paper would like to proffer the following recommendations:

- The Nigerian Government should work towards encouraging mandatory girl-child education by enacting a law that will make it compulsory for every girl-child to be entitled to best and quality education.
- Scholarships should also be set aside for girls so as to provide them the opportunity to access quality education where their parents cannot afford the bills.
- More emphasis should be laid on promotion of girls' rights; teaching of this should be introduced at all levels of education so as to foster awareness.
- The mindset of the people should also be changed against the notion that boys are better than girls. Parents must be conscientised that girls can do as good as or even better than boys in schools if given equal opportunities.
- Government should discourage the concentration of teachers in the urban centres and ensure equal distribution of social amenities in both the urban and rural areas to retain teachers and also create a department for the girl-child to ensure that quality education is given to the girl-child as well as to deal with their rights and welfare
- Government should strengthen public service information campaigns and community advocacy on girl-child education,
- Government should take appropriate measures to discourage child marriages, strengthen the enforcement of policies to enable pregnant girls and young mothers to stay in school.

- Government should examine and revive the curriculum and teachings in classes that are not gender bias.
- Government should expand flexible and non-formal education options, improve funding for girl-child education and ensure safe and supportive learning environment.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has been able to identify some of the issues facing girl-child education in Nigeria, ranging from accessibility to retention and school dropout as well as equity and quality of education. It has also been able to examine the importance of girl-child education and implication of these issues for national development in Nigeria. The paper concludes that education is the right of every girl-child, a key to a transforming her life and making her a responsible member of society. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and cannot play productive roles in society. Although efforts have been made by the government to improve girl-child education in Nigeria, a lot still needs to be done if the girl-child is to realize her potential and fully contribute to the political, socio-economic and technological transformation of the country.



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